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## Fate of Trump's Cabinet picks unclear as Republicans prepare to take power in Senate

By **MARY CLARE JALONICK**  
**Associated Press**

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — The fate of President-elect Donald Trump's Cabinet is still unclear after Republican senators spent much of December carefully dodging questions about Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s views on vaccines, accusations of sexual misconduct against Pete Hegseth and Tulsi Gabbard's 2017 meeting with then-President Bashar Assad of Syria.

While some GOP senators have indicated they are all-in for Trump's picks, others have withheld support, for now, especially on some of his more controversial nominees. The dynamic is injecting uncertainty into the process as Republicans prepare to take the Senate majority in January with a four-seat margin and as Trump aggressively challenges them to confirm his Cabinet immediately. It's not unusual for senators to wait until after confirmation hearings to publicly announce a decision. But Republicans are under more pressure than usual as Trump and his allies make clear that they will confront senators who don't fall in line.

"You only have control of the Senate because of Donald Trump," the president-elect's son, Donald Trump Jr., warned during a media appearance this month. "Without that, you'd be relegated to insignificance."

There has been one casualty of the process so far — former Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, who withdrew from contention as attorney general after senators relayed private concerns. But Trump has enthusiastically stood by the rest, including Kennedy for secretary of Health and Human Services, Hegseth for secretary of Defense and Gabbard for director of na-



**Robert F. Kennedy Jr., President-elect Donald Trump's nominee to be secretary of Health and Human Services, arrives to meet with Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Okla., a member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, at the Capitol in Washington, Monday, Dec. 16, 2024.**

**Associated Press**

tional intelligence.

With hearings starting by mid-January, before Trump is even inaugurated, senators will soon have to decide how closely they will scrutinize the nominees and whether they are willing to vote against any of them. Republicans will have a 53-47 majority, so Trump cannot lose more than three votes on any nomination if Democrats are united in opposition.

The outcome of the confirmation process, and the level of dissent in the Senate, will likely set the tone for Trump's presidency and his relationship with Congress, which was frequently tumultuous during his first term. He often clashed with the Senate, in particular, but has signaled he expects Republican senators to be more compliant this time around.

"It's not about putting yeses on the board, it's about keeping nos off the board," said Oklahoma Sen. Markwayne

Mullin, one of Trump's top allies in the Senate, who speaks with him frequently.

While most Senate Republicans have scrambled to display as much loyalty to Trump as possible, a handful have made clear that they are willing to defend the body's "advise and consent" role. Among the senators to watch are moderate Republicans Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Susan Collins of Maine and incoming freshman Sen. John Curtis of Utah.

"Anybody who wants to give me heat for doing my job, bring it on," Curtis said Sunday on ABC's "This Week" when asked about vetting Trump's nominees. "This is my job. It's my constitutional responsibility."

Still, even moderate senators have shied away from directly criticizing Trump's picks. And not a single Republican has gone on the record against a nominee.

Several of Trump's picks are

expected to sail to confirmation, perhaps even with some Democratic votes. Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., has indicated he will support Florida Sen. Marco Rubio for secretary of State and Rep. Elise Stefanik for United Nations ambassador, as have a few other Democrats.

For the more controversial nominees, though, party unity will be key.

One of Trump's most embattled picks is Hegseth, a Fox News host and veteran who some see as inexperienced and has publicly questioned whether women should serve in combat. He has also faced allegations of sexual assault and excessive drinking that he has denied. But it's all given some senators pause, despite Trump's enthusiastic support.

Hegseth has faced particular pressure from Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst, herself a combat veteran who has worked to address sexual assault

in the military. She has met with Hegseth several times, and has not yet said she will support him. She will have a chance to question him, publicly and face-to-face, in a Senate Armed Services Committee confirmation hearing that is scheduled for Jan. 14. Though a hearing for Gabbard has not yet been set, senators will also be able to question her publicly and in a classified setting about her trip to Syria after the U.S. had severed diplomatic relations. Gabbard has defended the trip, saying it's important to open dialogue, but critics hear echoes of Russia-fueled talking points in her commentary. Assad fled to Moscow earlier this month after opposition forces overtook Syria in a surprise attack, ending his family's five decades of rule. While Republican senators have mostly refrained from publicly expressing concerns about Gabbard's ties abroad, nearly 100 former senior U.S. diplomats and intelligence and national security officials have urged Senate leaders to schedule closed-door hearings to allow a full review of the government's files on her. Senators have been a bit more openly skeptical of Kennedy, who has long questioned the use of some vaccines.

After a report in the New York Times that one of his advisers filed a petition to revoke approval for the polio vaccine in 2022, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell issued a statement saying that "efforts to undermine public confidence in proven cures are not just uninformed — they're dangerous," and that "anyone seeking the Senate's consent to serve in the incoming administration would do well to steer clear of even the appearance of association with such efforts." □



# U.S. census data shows how Middle Eastern and Hispanic residents differ in racial identity

By MIKE SCHNEIDER  
Associated Press

As the U.S. Census Bureau gets public feedback about how it should tally people into new race and ethnicity groups, the agency has released new research reflecting how U.S. residents from different backgrounds regard their racial and ethnic identities.

Earlier this year, the U.S. government changed how it categorizes people by race and ethnicity to more accurately count residents who identify as Hispanic and of Middle Eastern and North African heritage. Before this year, the categories hadn't been changed in 27 years. Under the revisions, questions about race and ethnicity that previously were asked separately on forms will be combined into a single question. That will give respondents the option to pick multiple categories at the same time, such as "Black," "American Indian" and "Hispanic." Research has shown that large numbers of Hispanic people aren't sure how to answer the race question when that question is asked separately because they understand race and ethnicity to be similar and they often pick "some other race" or do not answer the question.

A Middle Eastern and North African category also was added to the choices available for questions about race and ethnicity. People



A billboard highlighting the 2020 Census is seen in Dearborn, Mich., on Thursday, April 30, 2020.  
Associated Press

descended from places such as Lebanon, Iran, Egypt and Syria had been encouraged to identify as white, but now will have the option of identifying themselves in the new group.

Results from the 2020 census, which asked respondents to write in their backgrounds on the form, suggest that more than 3.1 million U.S. residents identify as Middle Eastern and North African, otherwise known as MENA.

New research released this month by the Census Bureau showed that more than 2.4 million people, or around 80%, who wrote that their background was MENA did so under the white category

in the question about their race on the 2020 census questionnaire.

Almost 500,000 people, or more than 16%, who wrote that they were MENA identified themselves as "some other race," and almost 139,000 MENA people, or 4.5%, identified as Asian. Almost 50,000 MENA write-ins, or 1.6%, did so under the Black race category.

Among MENA subgroups, people of Lebanese and Syrian backgrounds had the highest percentages of people identifying their race as white, and people who identified as North African, Berber and Moroccan had the highest rates of marking

their race as Black. People with Omani, Emirati and Saudi backgrounds identified at the highest rates as Asian, the report said.

In a separate report also released this month, the Census Bureau said there was a noticeable variation regarding racial identity among different U.S. Hispanic groups in the 2020 census.

"Some other race" and American Indian and Alaska Native responses were most common among people from Central America. White and "some other race" responses were most prevalent among residents from South America. Black alone responses and "Black and

some other race" answers were most common among people from the Caribbean, the report said.

There also was variation by region and state.

The Northeast and West — particularly California, Maryland and New York — had the highest share of Hispanic respondents reporting that they were "some other race" alone. Identifying as white alone or "white and some other race" was most common among Hispanic respondents in the South. The Northeast had the highest share of Hispanic residents reporting as Black alone or "Black and some other race." The Midwest had the largest rate of Hispanic residents identifying as American Indian and Alaska Native, particularly in South Dakota, the report said.

The new race and ethnicity categories will be used by the Census Bureau starting in the 2027 American Community Survey — the most comprehensive survey of U.S. life — and the 2030 census, which determines how many congressional seats and Electoral College votes each state gets.

The Census Bureau is seeking feedback from the public through mid-February. The statistical agency wants to hear from groups who feel that they are misclassified or if any groups should be added to the list of codes used to tally people by race and ethnicity. □

## Biden signs a bill officially making the bald eagle the national bird of the US

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The bald eagle, a symbol of the power and strength of the United States for more than 240 years, earned an overdue honor on Tuesday: It officially became the country's national bird.

President Joe Biden signed into law legislation sent to him by Congress that amends the United States Code to correct what had long gone unnoticed and

designate the bald eagle — familiar to many because of its white head, yellow beak and brown body — as the national bird.

The bald eagle has appeared on the Great Seal of the United States, which is used in official documents, since 1782, when the design was finalized. The seal is made up of the eagle, an olive branch, arrows, a flag-like shield, the motto "E Pluribus Unum" and a constellation of stars.

Congress that same year designated the bald eagle as the the national emblem, and its image appears in a host of places, ranging from documents and the presidential flag to military insignia and U.S. currency, according to USA.gov.

But it had never been officially designated to be what many had just assumed it was — the national bird. The bald eagle is indigenous to North America. □



Uncle Sam, a 25-year-old bald eagle, sits on his perch in front of a U.S. flag before the Extreme Raptors Show at the Permian Basin Fair in the Ector County Coliseum fairgrounds in Odessa, Texas, on Wednesday Sept. 11, 2013.

Associated Press



# Man arraigned on murder charges in NYC subway death fanned flames with a shirt, prosecutors say

By CEDAR ATTANASIO

Associated Press

**NEW YORK (AP)** — The man accused of burning a woman to death inside a New York City subway train used a shirt to fan the flames, a prosecutor said Tuesday at his arraignment on murder charges.

Sebastian Zapeta, 33, who federal immigration officials said is a Guatemalan citizen who entered the U.S. illegally, was not required to enter a plea and did not speak at the hearing in Brooklyn criminal court.

Zapeta, wearing a white jumpsuit over a weathered black hooded sweatshirt, will remain jailed at the city's Rikers Island complex and is due back in court on Friday. His lawyer did not ask for bail.

Zapeta is charged with two counts of murder, accusing him of intentionally killing the woman and killing her while committing arson. He is also charged with one count of arson. The top charge carries a maximum sentence of life in prison without parole.

Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez called the attack a "gruesome and senseless act of violence" and said it would be "met with the most serious consequences."

The apparently random attack occurred Sunday morning on an F train that was stopped at the Coney Island station. The victim's identification is still pending.



Sebastian Zapeta, accused of setting a woman on fire inside a New York City subway train, appears in court, Tuesday, Dec. 24, 2024, in New York.

Authorities say Zapeta approached the woman, who may have been sleeping in the train, and set her clothing on fire with a lighter.

Zapeta then fanned the flames with a shirt, engulfing her in fire, Assistant District Attorney Ari Rottenberg said in court Tuesday.

Zapeta then sat on a bench on the subway platform and watched, Rottenberg said. According to Rottenberg, Zapeta told detectives that he didn't know what happened but identified himself in images of the attack.

Zapeta's lawyer, public defender Andrew Friedman, did not speak to reporters

after the arraignment. A message seeking comment was left for him.

Video on social media appears to show some people looking on from the platform and at least one police officer walking by while the woman is on fire inside the train.

NYPD Transit Chief Joseph Gulotta said Sunday that several officers responded to the fire and one stayed to keep the crime scene "the way it's supposed to be" while the others went to get fire extinguishers and transit workers. "Officers who were on patrol on an upper level of that station smelled

and saw smoke and went to investigate. What they saw was a person standing inside the train car fully engulfed in flames," Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said.

They eventually put the fire out, but "unfortunately, it was too late," Tisch said, and the woman was pronounced dead at the scene.

Zapeta was taken into custody Sunday afternoon while riding a train on the same subway line after teenagers recognized him from images circulated by the police.

A Brooklyn address for Zapeta released by police matches a shelter that provides housing and substance

abuse support. The shelter did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Federal immigration officials said Zapeta was deported in 2018 but later reentered the U.S. illegally.

The crime deepened a growing sense of unease among some New Yorkers about the safety of the subway system, amplified by graphic video of the attack that ricocheted across social media.

"It creeped me out real bad," said Deandre Nelson, 22.

Others said the attack hasn't changed their daily routine or how they feel about the subway.

"I don't think it gave me pause," said Collin Burroughs, 24. "I think it mostly just made me sad."

Overall, crime is down in the transit system compared to last year.

Major felonies declined 6% between January and November compared to the same time period last year, according to data from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. But murders are up, with nine killings this year through November compared to five during the same period last year.

There have also been several high-profile incidents, including one in September where police inadvertently shot two bystanders and a fellow officer when they opened fire on a man holding a knife in front of a train. □



A thick haze hangs over Manhattan in New York on July 20, 2021.

Associated Press

**ALBANY, N.Y. (AP)** — Large fossil fuel companies would have to pay fees to help New York fight the effects of climate change under a bill signed Thursday by Gov.

Kathy Hochul.

The new law requires companies responsible for substantial greenhouse gas emissions to pay into a state fund for infrastructure

## New York to charge fossil fuel companies for damage from climate change

projects meant to repair or avoid future damage from climate change.

Lawmakers approved the bill earlier this year to force big oil and gas companies to contribute to the cost of repairs after extreme weather events and resiliency projects such as coastal wetland restoration and upgrades to roads, bridges and water drainage systems.

"The Climate Change Superfund Act is now law, and New York has fired a shot that will be heard round the world: the companies

most responsible for the climate crisis will be held accountable," said state Sen. Liz Krueger, a Democrat who sponsored the bill.

"The planet's largest climate polluters bear a unique responsibility for creating the climate crisis, and they must pay their fair share to help regular New Yorkers deal with the consequences," Krueger said.

The biggest emitters of greenhouse gases between 2000 and 2018 would be subjected to the fines. The law won't start penalizing companies immediate-

ly. Instead, the state must come up with rules on how to identify responsible parties, notify companies of the fines and create a system to determine which infrastructure projects will be paid for by the fund. Legal challenges are expected.

"This type of legislation represents nothing more than a punitive new fee on American energy, and we are evaluating our options moving forward," the American Petroleum Institute, the oil industry's top lobbying group, said in a statement. □



# Ukraine's military intelligence says North Korean troops are suffering heavy battlefield losses

By **SAMYA KULLAB**

**Associated Press**

**KYIV, Ukraine (AP)** — North Korean troops are suffering heavy losses in the fighting in Russia's Kursk region and facing logistical difficulties as a result of Ukrainian attacks, Ukraine's military intelligence said Thursday.

The intelligence agency, known under its acronym GUR, said Ukrainian strikes near Novoivanovka inflicted heavy casualties on North Korean units. It said North Korean troops also faced supply issues and even shortages of drinking water.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said earlier this week that 3,000 North Korean troops have been killed and wounded in the fighting in the Kursk region. It marked the first significant estimate by Ukraine of North Korean casualties several weeks after Kyiv announced that North Korea had sent 10,000 to 12,000 troops to Russia to help it in the almost 3-year war. The casualty disclosure came as the Biden administration was pressing to send as much military aid as possible to Ukraine before President-elect Donald Trump takes over in January.

Ukrainian forces launched an incursion into the Kursk region in August, dealing a



**battlefield at Medical Service "Ulf" of the 108th Separate Battalion "Da Vinci Wolves" on Pokrovsk direction, Ukraine, Monday, Dec. 23, 2024.**

**Associated Press**

significant blow to Russia's prestige and forcing it to deploy some of its troops from eastern Ukraine, where they were pressing a slow-moving offensive.

The Russian army has been able to reclaim some territory in the Kursk region from Ukrainian forces, but has failed to fully dislodge them.

At the same time, Russia has sought to break Ukraine's resistance with waves of strikes with cruise missiles

and drones against Ukraine's power grid and other infrastructure.

The latest attack on Christmas morning involved 78 missiles and 106 drones, striking power facilities, Ukraine's air force said. It claimed to have intercepted 59 missiles and 54 drones and jammed 52 other drones.

On Thursday, Russia attacked Ukraine with 31 exploding drones. Twenty were shot down and another 11 didn't

reach their target due to jamming, the Ukrainian air force said.

As part of the daily barrage, Russian forces also struck a central market in Nikopol in the Dnipropetrovsk region with a drone, wounding eight people, according to local authorities.

Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened Thursday that Russia could again hit Ukraine with the new Oreshnik hypersonic ballistic missile

that was first used in a Nov. 21 strike on the Ukrainian city of Dnipro.

Speaking to reporters, Putin said Russia has just a few Oreshnik missiles, but added that it wouldn't hesitate to use them on Ukraine.

"We aren't in a rush to use them, because those are powerful weapons intended for certain tasks," he said. "But we wouldn't exclude their use today or tomorrow if necessary."

Putin said Russia has launched serial production of the new weapon and re-affirmed a plan to deploy some of Oreshnik missiles to Russia's neighbor and ally Belarus. Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko told reporters Thursday that his country could host 10 or more.

Ukraine struck back with drone strikes of its own. Ukraine's Center for Strategic Communications said the military struck a plant in Kamensk-Shakhtynsky in Russia's southern Rostov region that produces propellant for ballistic missiles.

"This strike is part of a comprehensive campaign to weaken the capabilities of the Russian armed forces to carry out terrorist attacks against Ukrainian civilians," it said in a statement. □

## Finland stops Russia-linked vessel over damaged undersea power cable in Baltic Sea

By **DAVID McHUGH**

**Associated Press**

**FRANKFURT, Germany (AP)** — Finnish authorities detained a ship linked to neighboring Russia as they investigate whether it damaged a Baltic Sea power cable and several data cables, police said, in the latest incident involving disruption of key infrastructure in the region.

Finnish police and border guards boarded the vessel, the Eagle S, early Thursday and took over the command bridge, Helsinki Police Chief Jari Liukku told a news conference. The vessel was being held in Finnish territorial waters, police said.

The Eagle S is flagged in the Cook Islands, but was described by Finnish customs

officials and the European Union's executive commission as part of Russia's shadow fleet of fuel tankers. Those are aging vessels with obscure ownership, acquired to evade Western sanctions amid the war in Ukraine and operating without Western-regulated insurance. Russia's use of the vessels has raised environmental concerns about accidents given their age and uncertain insurance coverage. The Eagle S's anchor is suspected of causing damage to the cable, Yle television reported, relying on police statements.

The EU's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, said in a statement that the incident was "the latest in a series of suspected attacks on critical infrastruc-

ture" and commended the Finnish authorities "for their swift action in boarding the suspected vessel." The ship "is part of Russia's shadow fleet, which threatens security and the environment, while funding Russia's war budget," said Kallas, a former Estonian prime minister. "We will propose further measures, including sanctions, to target this fleet." The Estlink-2 power cable, which brings electricity from Finland to Estonia across the Baltic Sea, went down on Wednesday. The incident follows damage to two data cables and the Nord Stream gas pipelines, both of which have been termed sabotage. The Estonian government met in emergency session over the incident. The



**This photo provided by Rajavartiolaitos (Finnish Border Guard) on Thursday, Dec. 26, 2024, shows the oil tanker Eagle S, background, and the Finnish Border Guard ship Turva at sea outside Porkkalanniemi, Finland.**

**Associated Press**

shadow tankers "are helping Russia to earn funds that will aid Russian hybrid attacks," Prime Minister Kristen Michal said at a news conference. "We need to improve the monitoring and protection of critical infrastructure both on land and on sea." He said repairs to the cable

could take as long as seven months.

"Repeated damage to Baltic Sea infrastructure signals a systemic threat, not mere accidents," Estonia's President Alar Karis said on X. "Estonia will take action to counter this threat, together with Finland and other NATO allies." □



# Aviation experts say Russia's air defense fire likely caused Azerbaijan plane crash as nation mourns

**By The Associated Press**

Aviation experts said Thursday that Russian air defense fire was likely responsible for the Azerbaijani plane crash the day before that killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured.

Azerbaijan Airlines' Embraer 190 was en route from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus on Wednesday when it was diverted for reasons still unclear and crashed while making an attempt to land in Aktau in Kazakhstan after flying east across the Caspian Sea. The plane went down about 3 kilometers (around 2 miles) from Aktau. Cellphone footage circulating online appeared to show the aircraft making a steep descent before smashing into the ground and exploding in a fireball.

Other footage showed part of its fuselage ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft lying upside down in the grass.

Azerbaijan mourned the crash victims with national flags at half-staff across the country on Thursday.

Traffic stopped at noon, and signals sounded from ships and trains as it observed a nationwide moment of silence.

Speaking at a news conference Wednesday, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev



**In this photo taken from a video released by the administration of Mangystau region, a part of Azerbaijan Airlines' Embraer 190 lies on the ground near the airport of Aktau, Kazakhstan, on Thursday, Dec. 26, 2024.**

said that it was too soon to speculate on the reasons behind the crash, but said that the weather had forced the plane to change from its planned course.

"The information provided to me is that the plane changed its course between Baku and Grozny due to worsening weather conditions and headed to Aktau airport, where it crashed upon landing," he said.

Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, said that preliminary information indicated that the pilots diverted to

Aktau after a bird strike led to an emergency on board. As the official crash investigation started, some experts alleged that holes seen in the plane's tail section could indicate that it could have come under fire from Russian air defense systems fending off a Ukrainian drone attack. Ukrainian drones had previously attacked Grozny, the provincial capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, and other regions in the country's North Caucasus. An official in Chechnya said another drone attack

on the region was fended off on Wednesday, although federal authorities didn't report it.

Mark Zee of OPSGroup, which monitors the world's airspace and airports for risks, said that the analysis of the images of fragments of the crashed plane indicate that it was almost certainly hit by a surface-to-air missile, or SAM.

"Much more to investigate, but at high level we'd put the probability of it being a SAM attack on the aircraft at being well into the 90-99%

bracket," he said.

Osprey Flight Solutions, an aviation security firm based in the United Kingdom, warned its clients that the "Azerbaijan Airlines flight was likely shot down by a Russian military air-defense system." Osprey provides analysis for carriers still flying into Russia after Western airlines halted their flights during the war. Osprey CEO Andrew Nicholson said that the company had issued more than 200 alerts regarding drone attacks and air defense systems in Russia during the war. "This incident is a stark reminder of why we do what we do," Nicholson wrote online. "It is painful to know that despite our efforts, lives were lost in a way that could have been avoided."

Yan Matveyev, an independent Russian military expert, noted that images of the crashed plane's tail reveal the damage compatible with shrapnel from a small surface-to-air missile, such as the Pantsyr-S1 air defense system.

"It looks like the tail section of the plane was damaged by some missile fragments," he said.

Matveyev added that it remains unclear why the pilots decided to fly hundreds of miles east across the Caspian Sea instead of trying to land at a closer airport in Russia after the plane was hit. □

**Associated Press**



**Migrants disembark at the port of "La Estaca" in Valverde at the Canary island of El Hierro, Spain, Monday, Aug. 26, 2024.**

**Associated Press**

**MADRID (AP)** — More than 10,000 migrants died while trying to reach Spain by sea this year, a report released by a Spanish migration rights group said on

Thursday. On average, that means 30 migrants died every day this year attempting to reach the country by boat, Caminando Fronteras (Walking Borders) said.

## More than 10,000 migrants died this year trying to reach Spain by sea, aid group says

Overall deaths rose 58% compared to last year, the report added.

Tens of thousands of migrants left West Africa in 2024 for the Canary Islands, a Spanish archipelago close to the African coast that has increasingly been used as a stepping stone to continental Europe.

Caminando Fronteras said most of the 10,457 deaths recorded up until Dec. 15, took place along that crossing, the so-called Atlantic route — considered

one of the world's most dangerous.

The organization compiles its figures from families of migrants and official statistics of those rescued. It included 1,538 children and 421 women among the dead. April and May were the deadliest months, the report said.

Caminando Fronteras also noted a "sharp increase" in 2024 in boats leaving from Mauritania, which it said became the main departure point on the route to

the Canary Islands.

In February, Spain pledged 210 million euros (around \$218 million) in aid to Mauritania to help it crack down on human smugglers and prevent boats from taking off.

Spain's interior ministry says more than 57,700 migrants reached Spain by boat until Dec. 15 this year, a roughly 12% increase from the same period last year. The vast majority of them came through the Atlantic route. □



## Aruban snacks and where to find them



**ORANJESTAD — Want to taste something different for a change? How about some Aruban snacks that you can find all around the island? Hop in your car, and go to these locations to find some of the most popular and tasty snacks that are beloved by our locals.**

One of the staples of Aruban cuisine and snacks is the Pastechi. Pastechi is a Caribbean fried pastry that is filled with cheese, meat, chicken, veggies and sometimes even fish! Or perhaps you might want to try a croquette, locally called a "kroket," which is a crusty fried snack with typically a meat and dough mix filling. The Aruban kroket is based on its Dutch counterpart, the "bitterbal".

These two snacks are typically found in all local snack trucks, which can be found all over the island, including on the side of the main road that stretches from San Nicolas to the Hotel Area. You can also find pastechis and krokets at local bakeries and snack shops, like Bright Bakery in Piedra Plat, Huchada in Santa Cruz or Pastechi House in the city center. These places may also sell other snacks and sandwiches too, perfect for on-

the-road lunch break.

While you're at it, why not accompany your snack with a refreshing "batido"? Batidos are fruit shakes, typically made with added milk for some creaminess. However, you can also ask to hold the milk. Batidos are commonly found in snack shops too. You may find some batido shops next the flea markets downtown, or if you're on your way to San

Nicolas, at Mauchi Smoothies and Juice Bar in Savaneta (located at the side of the main road).

If you are looking for something a bit more fresh and healthy, why not try some coconuts, or shaved ice from local vendors? These vendors carry their little shop at the back of their truck, so they are ever-moving around the island. However, there are a few spots where you can almost always find a coconut/shaved ice vendor:

1. Right next to the Red Anchor in San Nicolas, on the way to Baby Beach.
2. Along the main road next to the airport field.
3. At the California Light House.
4. At the Alto Vista Chapel.

These vendors may also sell other delights, like the beloved coconut-based dessert "cocada" or peanuts. All in all, in Aruba, you can



always find some place to take a break and have a bite of something local, you maybe just might have to look for them! □

Photo credit:  
wheninaruba.com



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# The Lionfish And its threat to our marine wild life



(Oranjestad)—Despite its colorful and striking appearance, the lionfish has become a Caribbean-wide problem for Atlantic sea life. The Aruban marine wild life is also affected by this beautiful dilemma, as it is foreign to our waters and has become a danger to our local fish and reefs.

Originating from the Indo-Pacific Ocean, the lionfish is a relatively small fish. It has no teeth, but it does protect itself against predators using its sharp, colorful spikes. It is

said that the sting of a lionfish can be up to 100 times more painful than that of a bee's sting.

Its natural predators in the Indo-Pacific are sharks and barracudas, but in the Caribbean Sea, local fish do not recognize the lionfish as part of their diet. In other words, the lionfish has no predators in the Caribbean Sea. And this becomes a major problem for our local marine life; if there are no predators to stimulate population control of lionfish, these fish can

continue to reproduce and expand to other parts of the Atlantic, become more invasive and dangerous for other types of fish.

For Aruba, the lionfish is a problem especially for our local coral reefs. According to Patrick van Brakel, lionfish expert and hunter from the Hunting Lionfish Aruba foundation, every reef has a "cleaning station"—tiny fish that eat algae and other types of waste on a reef, thus maintaining the reef's health and providing food to the fish population in the area. However, as the lionfish feeds off of these tiny fish, it becomes harder for the coral reef to maintain its health.

Patrick also shares the origins of lionfish in the Caribbean Sea. It is theorized that the introduction of these fish in the Atlantic happened in Florida, where people would buy lionfish from across the world to keep in their aquariums. However, lionfish grow, and as these buyers realized that the fish were too much up-



keep, they were let out into the ocean to roam free. From continental USA, the lionfish travelled to and invaded the entire Caribbean area, from Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao up to New York. In Aruba, lionfish were discovered in 2009.

Controlling the lionfish population is challenge, as each female fish can lay up to 40,000 eggs a day. Luckily, we have people like van Brakel who dedicate their lives hunting and capturing these invasive species, using them for consumption and

jewelry making.

They are caught with a hand spear, an object resembling a garbage picker with 4 sharp prongs. These spears are used like a sling shot to catch lionfish from a distance. These fish are then put into a collecting tube and taken out of the water. Van Brakel not only catches them himself, but also cooks them for locals and tourists at The LionFish Snack Aruba in Paradera. This way, he does his part in protecting the local wild life. □

## Aruba Tourism Authority honored loyal visitor at Costa Linda Beach Resort!



The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing Goodwill Ambassador of Aruba. The honoree was respectively honored with a certificate for her years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honorary certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

The three levels of honor are as follows:  
Distinguished Visitor (10>years consecutively visiting Aruba)

Goodwill Ambassador (20>years consecutively visiting Aruba)  
Emerald Ambassador (35>years consecutively visiting Aruba)

The honoree was:  
Goodwill Ambassador  
Mrs. Chyllene Waters from Chalfont, Pennsylvania, United States.

Mrs. Marouska Heyliger representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of Costa Linda Beach Resort bestowed the certificate upon the honoree, presented her with gifts, and thanked her for choosing Aruba as her favorite vacation destination, as her home away from home.

The top reasons for returning to Aruba provided by the honoree was:

- Aruba's beautiful beaches and water
- Aruba's friendly and welcoming people- "One big happy Island"
- "Great night life there is always something fun to do"
- "Relax with family and friends"
- "Great place to snorkel and diving"

On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honoree for her continued visits to the "One Happy Island". □



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## Best spots to view the sunset

(Oranjestad)—Today we celebrate Valentine's Day, and what can be more romantic than surprising your partner with a date watching the sunset. Aruba's sunset leave many speechless, and luckily, the best spots to view the sunset are entirely accessible and easy to find. Here are some of the best places to view the sunset on the island.

### California Light House

Of course, being one of the highest point easily accessible to locals and tourists, the California Light House hill not only offers a tremendous view of the sunset, but also a breath taking scenery of most of the island. In the distance you can spot all the hotels, the western shoreline and the wild waves that

crash on the northern side of the island.

### Manchebo & Eagle Beach

Speaking of the western shoreline, the best spots for viewing the sunset on the beach has to be either Manchebo Beach or at Eagle Beach, which stretch along the entire western coast of the island starting from behind Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort up to the Amsterdam Manor roundabout. The sunset on these beaches is truly breathtaking; the sky and ocean look so big and spacious, and paired with the orange/pink hue of the sunset, the white sandy beaches and the soft sounds of waves crashing—it can only be described as an experience!\*

### Arashi Beach

Another beach that has to be considered as another great spot to view the sunset. Arashi Beach is the last beach you will find along the western coast line, just before you drive up the hill to the California



Light House. A favorite for surfers and body boarders, the Arashi sky stretches out for miles, lending a spectacular canvas for the sun to create a masterpiece of orange, pink and purple hue.

### Hooiberg Hill

These last two options are for more active couples. If you and your partner like to hike, the Hooiberg Hill may be a great place for you to get your daily workout in and enjoy a beautiful view of the sunset and the island as a little reward. Climb on top the 587-step stairs

and reach the top to enjoy this incredible scenery.

### Casibari Rock Formation

If you're a rock climber, you might enjoy watching the sunset on top of the Casibari Rock Formation. It's no Yosemite, but it does offer a fun little exercise to get to the top. But if you prefer not to get your hands a little dirty, you can always use the stairs in the back.

Editor's note: This spot may be my personal favorite, if you couldn't already tell...☐



## Aruba to me

**ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.**

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is ..... Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: [news@arubatoday.com](mailto:news@arubatoday.com) and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, like-

ness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from Teresa Anastasopoulos

She wrote to us saying: "Aruba to me is he land of the beautiful sunsets!"

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers!☐





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## Visit the island's popular cave sites!

(Oranjestad)—Among the endless sea of dark brown sand and cacti, there are two caves hidden in the outskirts of San Nicolas, in the north-eastern area of the island. These caves, The Quadiriki cave and The Fontein Cave are open to visitors of the Arikok National Park, so if you ever decide to take an "off-road" tour in the park, be sure to visit these prehistoric caves... and be sure to bring a flashlight!

### Quadirikiri Cave

Known for its two chambers accompanied by a skylight, the Quadirikiri Cave is the most popular cave among locals and tourists, as it is easy to walk through and provides great lighting for pictures.

As with all prehistoric or ancient sites, there is always a folk legend that adds to the lore and mystery of the site. The Quadirikiri cave is no different. The most well-known legend behind the cave could be considered as Aruba's first love story, as it tells the tale of the undying love between the chief's daughter and her beloved. As legend would have it, the chief disapproved of his daughter's choice of lover, as

he thought him unworthy. Stubborn and filled with anger, the daughter refused to turn away her beloved.

So, the chief decided to lock her up in the Quadirikiri Cave, in hopes that she would soon calm down and turn away her lover. Her beloved, in turn, was locked away in the Tunnel of Love (Now known as the Huliba Cave).

Through the pathways underneath the Tunnel of Love running up to the Quadirikiri cave, the two love birds found each other, and refused to let each other go. Because of their stubbornness, they both died in the Quadirikiri Cave, their ascending spirits burning two holes in the ceiling of the cave. This is why the cave has two holes through which sunlight passes through to illuminate the chamber.

Though there have been discoveries of Amerindian drawing on the wall, these have mostly been ruined by vandalism. However, the Fontein Cave further up north, provides a better glimpse in prehistoric Amerindian paintings.



### Fontein Cave

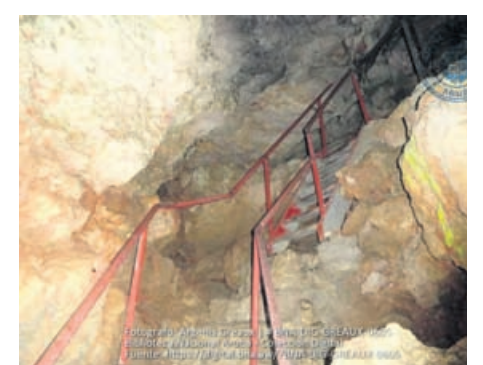
Longer than the Quadirikiri Cave, the Fontein Cave contains pathways that stretch to the limestone walls further down. Here is also where prehistoric drawings can be seen. Though this cave does not have its own legend, this was speculated to have been occupied—or at least used by prehistoric Arawak settlers on the island for rituals and other spiritual ceremonies.

### The Huliba Cave/ Tunnel of Love

The Huliba Cave, formerly known as the Tunnel of Love, was once open to the public, and was the biggest and most accessible of all three caves. This cave had five chambers, including one that is heart-shaped. This cave had narrow stairs that led to long pathways deep into the cave, with a staircase leading to the exit on the other side. In one of the chambers, there used to be the carving of the Virgin Mary, put there for the protection of the cave.

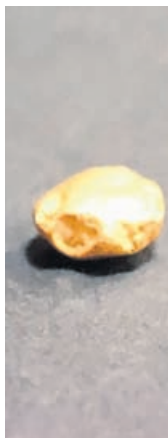
However, the Huliba Cave has been permanently closed for a few years now, as a way to preserve the bat population that lives in the cave. These Long Tongue Fruit Bats and Insect Eater Bats are very important to the ecosystem of the island. Though this cave is no longer accessible to the public, it surely is interesting to learn more about the history of these caves and the Awarak tribes that resided or utilized them.

Do note that these caves are very dark, humid, hot, and are inhabited by bats. Do wear comfortable clothing and shoes, as the pathways in these caves may be rough and bumpy, and don't forget to bring a flashlight!





## In celebration of 200 years of the Aruban gold rush: Get to know the history of the gold industry on Aruba



**(Oranjestad)—This year we celebrate a few milestone anniversaries on Aruba, one of them being the 200th anniversary of when gold was first discovered on the island. We have talked about the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruin before and its brief history during the gold industry on Aruba, but get to know a little more about the history of the “Aruban Gold Rush.”**

The first hint of gold on Aruba actually dates back to 1725, when rumors about gold being found in dug up treasure chests of the Spanish colonial era prompted the first official exploration for gold on the island, commissioned by the Dutch West India Company. Under the leadership of Mr. Paulus Printz, a three-year search was conducted on Aruba, to no avail. Though they found some specks of gold, it was not enough to motivate a further search, and the assignment was discontinued by Printz himself. It wasn't until 100 years later, in 1824, when a young farmer boy named Willem Rasmijn found a lump of gold while out herding his father's sheep in the area of Rooi Fluit on the north coast. His father took it to a local merchant who then sold the lump for \$70. Unbeknownst to the boy and his father, they quite literally struck gold, and as word got out, a gold fever spread among the locals who started searching for more gold.

When the colonial governor in Curacao, Governor Cantz'laar, heard about the news, he sent his adjutant, Capitan van Raders, to start harvesting gold. This was in July 1824. In August of that same year, the governor followed suit to the island, accompanied by high-ranking military officials. When citizens started swarming the area in search for gold, The Netherlands sent more troops to safe guard the gold.

Prominent places where gold was found was in Daimari, Wacobana, Arikok, Rooi Fluit, Hadicouradi and later West punt, where gold ore was found. Because of a lack in advanced technology and materials to harvest the gold, the process took a more primitive approach: Clay rocks containing traces of gold were left to dry in the sun. Then, workers would start chipping the clay away on a large canvas to catch the gold particles that were left behind after the wind blew away the dust from the clay.

In the harvest period of 1824-1825, there was a total of 71,000 kilos collected through commissioned harvesting. Locals themselves reportedly found about 25 pounds worth of gold in the nearby rivers. The following years after that first big harvest, commission work fell off, and in 1828, the director of the goldmines, Johan Gravenhorst, decided to halt harvesting.

Almost 40 years later, the London-based Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd. was granted concession. The firm built their gold mines on Bushiribana, and in the port of Oranjestad a long road that connected the gold mill to the port. The ores themselves came from Sero Plat en Sero Cristal.

By this point, workers were still using primitive methods to harvest the ores. For example, when someone had to go into the mines, there were no stairs or lifts; the person had to be brought down in a big bucket, with two or more workers holding the bucket by a thick rope above ground. Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd. reportedly operated until 1899, and right after the Aruba Gold Concession Ltd. was established, coincidentally also based in London. This time, the gold mill in Balashi was built, and more mines were dug up all around the island. The gold ores that were found were transported via track engine, locally called the “trekinchi”. Despite being more equipped for the job, the Aruba Gold Concession Ltd. could not produce any real profit, and so the concession was terminated just eight years later, in 1908.

A local firm, the “Aruba Goud Maatschappij” (Aruba Gold Company) took over the concession, along with all the materials and equipment. In the beginning, the company saw good profit, and for a while, the island's economy depended primarily on the mining and harvesting of gold. But just like its predecessors, the streak of luck for the Aruba Gold Company came to an end when WWI broke out.

The main reason why production stopped this time was reportedly because of a lack in dynamite for extracting the ores from the mines, as well as a lack in raw materials like German cyanide for the refining process. By the time the war ended, the equipment that was left at Balashi were too old to use again. After the war, gold production on the Aruba was left to a standstill.

According to an issue in Aruba Esso News paper in 1953, Henny Eman wanted to start up digging again, this time using independent miners. He argued that there was proof of more gold to be discovered. Plus, hiring independent miners would boost the island's employment rate.

When it was proven that gold was in fact still present, the executive board on the island promised to fund the project only if the gold dug up proved to be valuable. However, nothing else was reported after this, so it could be concluded that there was no real profitable market on the island anymore.

The ruins of the Bushiribana and Balashi Gold Mills are still standing, and open for the public to visit. These structures offer a glance into the past, to a time where Aruba experienced one of its first wave of industrialization. Today, these structures are persevered as historical monuments. □

Source:

1. “De Kolibrie op de Rots (en meer over the geschiedenis van Aruba)” by Evert Bongers.
2. Aruba Esso News, 1953 issue.



# CROSSWORD

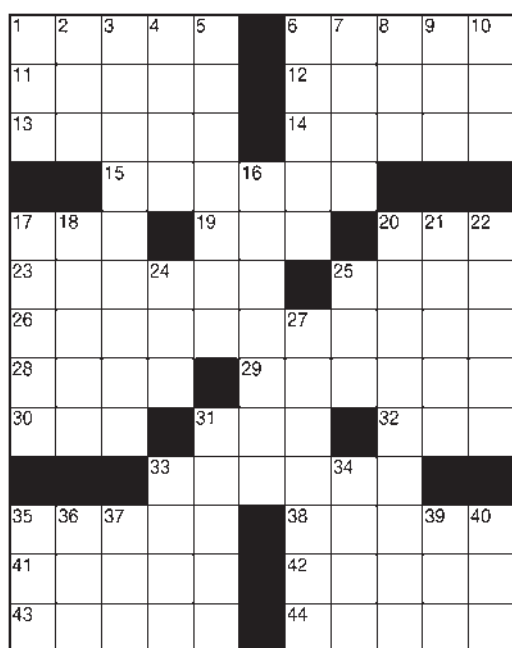
By THOMAS JOSEPH

## ACROSS

- 1 Diamond corners
- 6 Sleepy mammal
- 11 Bert's pal
- 12 "Beetle-juice" girl
- 13 Squirrel's find
- 14 Rival
- 15 Setting of Thomas Hardy novels
- 17 Back muscle
- 19 Caribou's kin
- 20 Weed whacker
- 23 Designer Pucci
- 25 Spigots
- 26 Rangers' worries
- 28 Grove growth
- 29 Frozen plain
- 30 "For sure!"
- 31 Director Anderson
- 32 Method Florentine family
- 35 Eggs purchase
- 38 Tadpole, e.g.
- 41 In the future
- 42 Supine protest
- 43 Boxer Liston

## DOWN

- 1 Arthur of TV
- 2 Compass trace
- 3 Some are studded
- 4 Cork's country
- 5 Dojo VIPs
- 6 Glossy
- 7 Bobcat's kin
- 8 Lyric poem
- 9 Dickens boy
- 10 Cow chow
- 16 Like some spoons
- 17 Southpaw
- 18 Love, in Livorno
- 20 Makes auto-matic, as a behavior
- 21 Sung drama
- 22 School paper
- 24 "Crooklyn" director
- 25 Badge metal
- 27 Edible spirals
- 31 Friend of Peter
- 33 Cruel
- 34 Early farmer
- 35 German article
- 36 Cry of surprise
- 37 Meditative school
- 39 Contend
- 40 Industrious one



12-28

A XYDLBAAXR  
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-28

## CRYPTOQUOTE

FCJKN NCOQ SUMDJ S NMZJP;  
ELW NLZGXKO'M YDZYXD UDDX

SN UJDD MZ KDXCQLM CO  
ELSMHDHJ NGOXCQLM JDPSCON

MZ MLDP? — JZND TDOODKW  
Cryptoquote: DON'T BE AFRAID TO  
START OVER AGAIN. THIS TIME, YOU'RE NOT  
STARTING FROM SCRATCH; YOU'RE STARTING  
FROM EXPERIENCE. — UNKNOWN

# Cruise ship Schedule: December 23 - 27 2024

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
MON	23	SILVER RAY	08.00	23.00	C	1
		AIDAPERLA	08.00	18.00	B	1
TUE	24	CELEBRITY REFLECTION	08.00	21.00	B	1
		CARNIVAL HORIZON	08.00	22.00	C	1
		MSC DIVINA	08.00	22.00	I	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1
WED	25	ROTTERDAM	08.00	17.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN GEM	07.00	21.00	C	1
THU	26	OCEANIA INSIGNIA	08.00	23.00	I	1
		CELEBRITY ECLIPSE	11.30	21.00	C	1
		EMERALD PRINCESS	09.00	22.00	B	1
FRI	27	SEVEN SEAS NAVIGATOR	09.00	23.59	B	1
		SILVER MOON	08.00	23.00	I	1
		NORWEGIAN JADE	07.00	20.00	C	1

# Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basicbut important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



buy bottled water from the store.

## Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

## Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to

## Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

## Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your be-

longings safe.

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Building D  
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Studio wk # 5 room # 8105  
Building D 1 st floor  
Contract expire : 01/22/2037  
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# 953 One bedroom week 01  
room # 654  
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**Aruba Divi Phoenix**

Palm beach  
Two bedroom week 01 room  
#672  
Contract expire :31 st December  
2047  
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2025  
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2025  
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view  
Price :\$ 12,000  
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Room # 2522  
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Call :011-297-630-1307  
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Private islands  
One bedroom week #2  
Room # 2325  
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Price :\$11,000  
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com

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3 BR 3 Bath sleep 12  
Date : 8 February to 22 Febru-  
ary 2025  
All inclusive  
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Johnnypaesch@gmail.com

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Eagle beach  
One bedroom week 50 room  
#2258 Birdie 10  
24 weeks remaining on the  
contract Price :\$ 8000  
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johnnypaesch@gmail.com

**Divi Village golf**

Eagle beach  
One bedroom week # 51  
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS



# Americans are exhausted by political news. TV ratings and a new AP-NORC poll show they're tuning out

By **DAVID BAUDER and LINLEY SANDERS**  
**Associated Press**

**NEW YORK (AP)** — As a Democrat who immersed himself in political news during the presidential campaign, Ziad Aunallah has much in common with many Americans since the election. He's tuned out.

"People are mentally exhausted," said Aunallah, 45, of San Diego. "Everyone knows what is coming and we are just taking some time off."

Television ratings — and now a new poll — clearly illustrate the phenomenon. About two-thirds of American adults say they have recently felt the need to limit media consumption about politics and government because of overload, according to the survey from the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Smaller percentages of Americans are limiting their intake of news about overseas conflicts, the economy or climate change, the poll says. Politics stand out. Election news on CNN and MSNBC was taking up too much of Sam Gude's time before the election, said the 47-year-old electrician from Lincoln, Nebraska. "The last thing I want to watch right now is the interregnum," said Gude, a Democrat and no fan of President-elect Donald Trump. Poll finds more Democrats



People watch as television screens show Republican presidential nominee former President Donald Trump addressing supporters on Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 5, 2024, at Comet Tavern in Seattle.

than Republicans stepping away from news

The poll, conducted in early December, found that about 7 in 10 Democrats say they are stepping back from political news. The percentage isn't as high for Republicans, who have reason to celebrate Trump's victory. Still, about 6 in 10 Republicans say they've felt the need to take some time off too, and the share for independents is similar. The differences are far starker for the TV networks that have been consumed by political news.

After election night through Dec. 13, the prime-time viewership of MSNBC was an

average of 620,000, down 54% from the pre-election audience this year, the Nielsen company said. For the same time comparison, CNN's average of 405,000 viewers was down 45%.



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At Fox News Channel, a favorite news network for Trump fans, the post-election average of 2.68 million viewers is up 13%, Nielsen said. Since the election, 72% of the people watching one of those three cable networks in the evening were watching Fox News, compared to 53% prior to election day.

A post-election slump for fans of the losing candidate is not a new trend for networks that have become heavily identified for a partisan audience. MSNBC had similar issues after Trump was elected in 2016. Same for Fox in 2020, although that was complicated by anger: many of its viewers were outraged then by the network's crucial election night call of Arizona for the Democratic presidential candidate, Joe Biden, and sought alternatives.

MSNBC had its own anger issues after several "Morning Joe" viewers became upset that hosts Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski visited Trump shortly after his victory last month. Yet while the show's ratings are down 35% since Election Day, that's a smaller drop than the network's prime-time ratings. CNN points out that while it has been suffering in the television ratings, its streaming and digital ratings have been consistent.

Will political interest rebound

when Trump takes office? MSNBC can take some solace in history. In previous years, network ratings bounce back when the depression after an election loss lifts. When a new administration takes office, people who oppose it are frequently looking for a gathering place.

"I'll be tuning back in once the clown show starts," Aunallah said. "You have no choice. Whether or not you want to hear it, it's happening. If you care about your country, you have no choice but to pay attention."

But the ride may not be smooth. MSNBC's slide is steeper than it was in 2016; and there's some question about whether Trump opponents will want to be as engaged as they were during his first term. People are also unplugging from cable television in rates that are only getting more rapid, although MSNBC believes it has bucked this trend eating away at audiences before. The poll indicates that Americans want less talk about politics from public figures in general. After an election season where endorsements from celebrities like Taylor Swift made headlines, the survey found that Americans are more likely to disapprove than approve of celebrities, large companies and professional athletes speaking out about politics.

Still, Gude is among those discovering other ways to get news to which he does want to pay attention, including on YouTube.

MSNBC is also in the middle of some corporate upheaval that raises questions about potential changes. Parent company Comcast announced last month that the cable network is among some properties that will spin off into a new company, which will give MSNBC new corporate leadership and cut its ties to NBC News.

Advice for networks who want to see the viewers return

Some of the Americans who have turned away from political news lately also had some advice for getting them engaged again. □

## How to reach us!

**Downtown**



# Jim Larrañaga steps down at Miami, Bill Courtney takes over to finish season

By **TIM REYNOLDS**  
**AP Basketball Writer**  
**CORAL GABLES, Fla. (AP)** —

Jim Larrañaga insists he still loves the University of Miami, still loves the game of basketball, still loves mentoring players, still loves coaching. He doesn't love what college basketball has become. And with that, he's leaving.

The 75-year-old Larrañaga stepped down Thursday, effective immediately, and will be replaced by associate head coach Bill Courtney — one of his best friends for the past three decades — for the remainder of the season.

"I'm exhausted," Larrañaga said. "I've tried every which way to keep this going."

Larrañaga joins a long line of prominent college basketball coaches — Virginia's Tony Bennett and Villanova's Jay Wright among them — who have left their jobs in recent years citing the changes in the game and the challenge of coaching in the Name, Image and Likeness era of college sports.

For Larrañaga, those changes began presenting themselves when he had eight players — all of whom said they were happy at Miami — enter the transfer portal after the Hurricanes went to the Final Four in 2023.

"The opportunity to make money someplace else created a situation that you have to begin to ask yourself as a coach what is this all about," Larrañaga said. "And the answer is it's become professional."



**Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga yells from the sideline during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game against Tennessee, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024, in New York.**

Associated Press

The decision by Larrañaga ends a 14-year run as coach of the Hurricanes — and, presumably, a 41-year college head-coaching career that saw him win 744 games at Miami, American International, George Mason and Bowling Green. He took Miami to the Final Four in 2023 and took George Mason to the Final Four in 2006.

The Hurricanes are 4-8 this season and only 5-19 in their last 24 games, a stunning freefall for a program that went to the Final Four just two seasons ago. Injuries and roster turnover have taken a clear toll, and Larrañaga is one of many coaches who has expressed some level

of frustration with the lack of regulation and transparency that comes with NIL.

"I owe my professional career to him," said George Washington coach Chris Caputo, a longtime Miami assistant under Larrañaga. "I learned so much and I certainly wouldn't be where I am without him and his family. As it relates to Miami, with all respect to the people there before him, he took what was essentially an irrelevant program and turned it into a Sweet 16, Elite Eight and Final Four program. At Miami, that was unheard of. He raised the bar for basketball at the University of Miami from here on out."

Larrañaga was under contract into 2027 and had some school officials try to get him to rethink the decision in recent days. Larrañaga said he came to the decision over the weekend, reconsidered at the school's request, and finalized the decision Monday. "It seems clear to me that coaching in 2024 is a much different profession than it was just a few short years ago," Miami athletic director Dan Radakovich said. Larrañaga is the second prominent coach to step down unexpectedly this season in the Atlantic Coast Conference. Bennett did the same at Virginia back in October, less than three weeks before the Cavaliers played their season-opener.

Bennett, when he stepped down, said NIL has simply changed the game for coaches and not in a good way.

"College athletics is not in a healthy spot. It's not," Bennett said in October. "And there needs to be change. It's not going to go back. I think I was equipped to do the job here the old way — that's who I am and that's how it was." Larrañaga's decision to step aside makes him the latest big-name veteran coach to leave the ACC in recent seasons, following the departures of some other giants within the sport — North Carolina's Roy Williams in spring 2021, Duke's Mike Krzyzewski a year later and Syracuse's Jim Boeheim to end a 47-year tenure in 2023, and Bennett earlier

this year. It's also the second sudden retirement for Miami's basketball programs in 2024: women's coach Katie Meier surprised many around the Hurricanes when she stepped away this past spring after 19 seasons in Coral Gables. Meier has remained at the school as a special advisor to Radakovich and as a professor.

Larrañaga will be offered a role within the university in the coming weeks, Radakovich said.

"It's still all about The U," Larrañaga said.

Officially, Larrañaga's first coaching job was in 1977 at American International. Unofficially, it was when he was a freshman at Archbishop Malloy High School in New York. Larrañaga was on an undefeated freshman team there and the coach quit at Christmas — so Jack Curran, the varsity coach there, named Larrañaga one of the student coaches for the rest of the season.

More than 60 years later, it was Larrañaga stepping down at Christmastime.

He played college basketball at Providence, has coached more than two dozen college players who went on to the NBA, made 20 postseason appearances — 11 NCAA, eight NIT and one CIT berth — as a coach, was the AP national coach of the year in 2013 and was announced earlier this month as a candidate again for enshrinement in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. □

# Jackson breaks Vick's NFL rushing record for QBs in Ravens' rout over Texans

By **KRISTIE RIEKEN**  
**AP Sports Writer**

**HOUSTON (AP)** — Baltimore's Lamar Jackson passed Michael Vick for the most rushing yards by a quarterback in NFL history in a 31-2 victory over the Houston Texans on Wednesday.

"Michael Vick, one of my favorite players," Jackson said. "That's just dope."

Jackson moved past Vick on a 6-yard run in the third quarter. Jackson had 87 yards rushing to give him

6,110 yards, moving him past Vick, who had 6,109 in his 13-year career.

Jackson, the regular-season MVP last season and in 2019, threw two touchdown passes and had a 48-yard scoring run to lead the Ravens to the win. And he needed just more than three quarters to do it, giving way to Josh Johnson with about 10 minutes left and the game long decided.

"Just having fun," Jackson said. "The NFL is not easy.

I don't care what nobody says. It looks easy, but it's not." Coach John Harbaugh raved about Jackson's season. He has a career-high and franchise-record 39 touchdown passes with just four interceptions and has four touchdown runs.

"Sometimes I just shake my head and say: 'That was a really great play,'" Harbaugh said. "I see a lot of great plays from Lamar Jackson. I told him I was proud of him. I'm not just proud of him be-



**Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson (8) runs off the field after an NFL football game against the Houston Texans, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2024, in Houston.**

Associated Press

cause he makes great plays. I'm proud of him for all the things that go into make the

great plays but also for all the things that he's overcome along the way." □





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# 1,000-yard rushers are keeping pace with 1,000-yard receivers for a change in the NFL

By **JOSH DUBOW**  
AP Pro Football Writer

Led by free-agent bargains Saquon Barkley and Derrick Henry, the number of big-play running backs is rivaling the number of high-production wide receivers for a change.

With two weeks remaining in the season, there are 11 players who have reached the 1,000-yard milestone in both rushing and receiving, a far cry from the pattern in recent seasons.

The last time there were as many 1,000-yard rushers as receivers in an entire season came in 2010 when there were 17 of each. While that might not happen this season, with more pass catchers nearing the mark than runners, it does figure to be far closer than it has been the last decade when there were more than twice as many receivers (233) hitting the mark than runners (110).

The running renaissance is being led by Barkley and Henry, who have elevated their teams with their big-play ability after signing deals that are far smaller than the ones that go to top wideouts.

The Eagles' Barkley leads the NFL in rushing with 1,838 yards and could become the ninth player in NFL history to reach 2,000 yards in a season. He still has an outside shot at breaking Eric Dickerson's single-season record of 2,105 in a 16-game season in 1984. Barkley needs 268 yards to break that in a 17-game season.

Barkley has been a big-play threat all season, including a 68-yard TD run on Sunday against Washington. He's the first player in NFL history with at least four TD runs of 65 yards or more in the



Philadelphia Eagles running back Saquon Barkley (26) running with the ball during the first half of an NFL football game against the Washington Commanders, Sunday, Dec. 22, 2024, in Landover, Md.

Associated Press

same season.

The Ravens' Henry has 1,636 yards rushing, making this the first season since 2012 with multiple backs topping the 1,600-yard mark. Henry became the fifth player to top 1,500 yards at least four times in a career and is one shy of Barry Sanders' record of five. Dickerson, Walter Payton and Edgerrin James also did it four times.

## Rare rookies

Washington's Jayden Daniels and Las Vegas' Brock Bowers are on the verge of some record-setting rookie seasons.

Daniels threw five touchdown passes to lead the Commanders to a 36-33 comeback win over Philadelphia that snapped Washington's 98-game losing streak in games the team trailed by at least 13 points in the fourth quarter. Daniels threw for 258 yards and ran for 81 more, joining 2015 MVP Cam Newton as

the only players NFL history with at least 250 yards passing, 75 yards rushing and five TD passes in a game.

Daniels has 737 yards rushing this season and needs just 79 more to break the record of 815 that Robert Griffin III set for Washington in 2012. Daniels is already just the second rookie QB to win 10 starts and produce at least 4,000 yards rushing and passing, joining Andrew Luck, who did it in 2012 for Indianapolis.

Bowers had 11 catches for 99 yards for the Raiders on Sunday to tie Anquan Boldin for the third-most catches in a season by a rookie with 101. Bowers needs five more catches in the final two weeks to break Puka Nacua's record set last season for the Rams. Malik Nabers of the New York Giants also could do it; he has 97 catches this season.

Bowers' 1,067 yards receiving are 9 shy of matching

the rookie record for tight ends set by Hall of Famer Mike Ditka in 1961 for Chicago.

## Just for kicks

In a record-setting season for long kicks, no one has done it quite at the level of Dallas' Brandon Aubrey. Aubrey has made an NFL-record 14 field goals from at least 50 yards, one more than Houston's Ka'imi Fairbairn has made.

Those two account for 27 of the record 173 field goals of at least 50 yards, beating the record of 158 set just last season. There already have been twice as many field goals from at least 50 yards this season as there were as recently as 2019, when there were just 84.

Aubrey made two kicks from 58 yards, one from 53 and another from 49 this past week, to set another record. His 36 made field goals have combined for 1,636 yards for the most

yards on made field goals in any season, topping Justin Tucker's 1,601 in 2016 for Baltimore.

## 49ers feast or famine

San Francisco's latest loss extended an odd streak of feast or famine for the franchise after the 49ers were assured of a losing season. Over the last 22 seasons, San Francisco has had a winning record just seven times but made it to the NFC title game or Super Bowl in each of those seasons.

The Niners are tied for the ninth-fewest seasons with a winning record in that span but have the second-most conference championship game appearances, trailing only the 12 for New England.

Falling flat following a Super Bowl loss isn't new for the 49ers, who went 6-10 in 2020, the season after losing to Kansas City in the Super Bowl.

The only other teams in the last 17 seasons to have a losing record the season after playing in the Super Bowl are the 2022 Rams (5-12) and the 2016 Panthers (6-10).

## Blanked

Green Bay delivered the NFL's first shutout of the season.

The Packers beat New Orleans 34-0 on Monday night to make sure the 2024 season wouldn't be the first in NFL history without a shutout. The previous low in any season was two, which has happened five times overall and twice in the Super Bowl era, in 2015 and 1994. This was the latest in a season for the first shutout, with the NFL having never gone more than eight weeks into a campaign without a team getting blanked. That last happened in 2010. □